

Unit of Study: Descriptive Writing
Content Overview
Valerie Sax

Introduction – In this unit of study students apply the characteristics of descriptive writing through a study of the natural world that surrounds them.

Unit Length: 4 weeks

Mentor Text List:

A Desert Scrapbook by Virginia Wright-Frieson
Guess Who My Favorite Person Is by Byrd Baylor (Out of print)
I'm in Charge of Celebrations by Byrd Baylor
Water Dance by Thomas Locker
Twilight Comes Twice by Ralph Fletcher

Week by Week Overview:

Week 1: Mentor Sentences: A Desert Scrapbook

Week 2: Writing with Detail: Guess Who My Favorite Person Is

Week 3: Using Your Senses: I'm In Charge of Celebrations

Week 4: Lift a Line: Twilight Comes Twice and Water Dance

Unit of Study: Descriptive Writing

Developed by Valerie Sax

Background Information:

This is a unit of study based on descriptive writing in nature. Prior to this unit, students were encouraged to pay attention to the world around them and to, “Write what’s in front of your nose.” Descriptive writing uses:

- Sensory language
- Showing language (paints a word picture for the reader)
- Vivid and rich detail
- Figurative language

All of these traits were taught in my writer’s workshop before beginning this unit of study. Through the use of Mentor Text at the sentence level students further developed their observational skills and their craft as descriptive writers.

Week 1: Sentence Structure: A Desert Scrapbook

- Read text and do inquiry chart at sentence level (see charts, pages 1-2)
What is the author doing? Why is the author doing it? How can we use this craft in our own writing?
- Pull specific mentor sentences for deep study of sentence structure:
Text example: “A desert pack rat is asleep, curled up deep inside its messy mound of cactus joints, sticks, leaves, bark, and rocks.”
- Students try out a few sentences based on the model and share out (page 3)
- Homework: Find a place to sit and view nature. Write 3 more sentences at home based on the mentor sentence model. Share out the next day in class (student example, page 4).
- Pick the best sentence of the week to type up and illustrate.

Week 2: Writing with Detail: Guess Who My Favorite Person Is

- Read text and do inquiry chart for vivid and rich detail
- Pull specific mentor sentences for deep study of how the author used detail:
Text example: “You know the blue on a lizard’s belly? That sudden kind of blue you see just for a second sometime – so blue that afterwards you think you made it up?”
- Students try out a few sentences based on the model and share out (pages 5-6)
- Homework: Write 3 more sentences at home based on the mentor text model. Share out the next day in class

Week 3: Uses Your Senses: I'm in Charge of Celebrations

- Read text and do inquiry chart for sensory detail
Example: Dust Devil Day
- Students revisit text, highlight favorite lines and share out loud.
- Pull specific mentor sentences for deep study. Chart how the author gets us to feel, see, hear, what she does:

I'm in Charge of Celebrations By Byrd Baylor		
How does the author get us to experience what she does?		
SEE:	HEAR:	FEEL:
<u>Strong Verbs:</u> Swaying, Falling, Turning "Dancing in time to their own windy music." (shows movement) And, And, And....Brings Attention <u>Specificity:</u> Sticks, sand, feathers, dry tumbleweeds... <u>Setting:</u> Coming up the flats... Ending in a canyon... Trotting through the brush... <u>List separated by commas:</u> Gives a slow feel to her action "Following deer tracks, bending down, taking my time..."	<u>Strong Verbs:</u> Running Yelling <u>Adjectives:</u> Easy, silent way	<u>Feelings:</u> Special Lucky "Out of all time it had to be one moment only." "You have to run to meet them...yelling...whirling around..." "The dirt has to feel good and warm on bare feet."

- Students try out a few sentences based on the model and share out (page 7)
- Homework: Talk about a celebration of nature you had with your family. List 5-10 details in your writer's notebook. Come to class with an idea for your own celebration
- Students write their own Celebrations

Week 4: Lift A Line: Twilight Comes Twice

- Read text for enjoyment
- Students read, share, recite favorite parts of the text
- Students lift their favorite line and create a new poem (pages 8-9)

Extention: Students create new Celebrations on nature field trips to local lagoons/beaches

Reading Like a Writer

Mentor Text:

Author:

What is the author doing?	Why is the author doing this?	What can we call this?	When can we use this in our own writing?

Inquiry Chart			
Example from Text	What is the Author Doing?	Why is the Author Doing It?	Name It! / Academic Term

Mentor sentences

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REINFORCED



A Crow Croaks in the early morning,
its babies clucked together in a
nest of branches, grass, and plants.

REINFORCED



A Barn Owl flies on silent wings
in a dark, starry night, searching
for small animals in the tall grass.

REINFORCED



REINFORCED



A hawk swooped down to catch its prey, it likes eating small animals like mice, lizards, or small snakes.

Janette Jin

A bee flying through the air, it is gathering nectar from flowers.

Brayden Hamler

My brother is asleep, very peaceful, very quiet, curled up in his warm bed, pressed against the wall.

Corinne Andrus

A beta fish is swimming, fluttering its little fins, moving around looking for food.

Nathan Strohm

My favorite color

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My favorite color is Pink. The pink like when you chew soft gooey Bubble Gum. Like also when you see the pink on the rainbow fading away into the mist like a star fish.

Brooke My favorite color ⁶

My favorite color is blue. You know, that sparkly blue you might see in Mexico? That ocean clear blue that makes you want to just jump in and splash around. Its that blue that you see when the sun glares down on it, and it sparkles with that sorta catchy look. Yea, thats my favorite blue. It reminds me of standing on the beach with the rushing sand between my toes.

3/1/10 7

Deer Day

I was lucky on Deer Day because of all time it had to be one special moment. It was May 21, 2007 we were camping Yellow Stone National Park. I was taking my time bending down following some rabbit tracks and I looked up at the right moment. A deer trotted by in that easy kind of way. The deer stopped and stared at me it had white spots on its brown furry coat and then it trotted into the forest I was speechless and that was a cause for a celebration. Now May 21, 2007 is Deer Day.

Tide Pools

By
Rebecca Clark

I pass through a gateway of stone walls.
Gleaming in the silver moonlight.
Thousands of small animals
floating on and in my shallow waters.
Peeking over the edge of the rock,
sunlight shines on the sea.
Drawn upward by warm breeze,
crashing down into the sea.
I am the Tide Pools.

Water dance

Left a line

*Twilight Comes Twice
Left a line*

The Blackness Appears

By

Matthew Reynolds

Slowly dusk pours the syrup of darkness into the forest. The stars pop out of nowhere. The blackness oozes out in front of the beautiful sky and fills the air with freshness.